DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 042 173 AL 002 537

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TITLE	Verbal Strategies in Multilingual Communication.
INSTITUTION	California Univ., Berkeley. Language and Behavior Research Lab.
SPONS AGENCY	California Univ., Berkeley. Inst. of International Studies.; National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Bethesda, Md.
REPORT NO	WP-36
PUB DATE	Jun 70
NOTE	22p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.20
DESCRIPTORS	Ability Grouping, Biculturalism, *Bilingualism, Bilingual Students, Classroom Communication, *Communication (Thought Transfer), Cultural Background, *Cultural Pluralism, *Language Styles, Language Usage, Mexican Americans, Negro Dialects, Social Factors, *Sociolinguistics, Teacher Attitudes, Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Code Switching

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the phenomenon of code switching among bilinguals. Whereas previous studies of code switching have, however, concentrated on instances in which code alternation can be correlated with a change in social occasion, this paper uses examples from the speech of Mexican-American and Afro-American bilinguals to focus on those instances in which seemingly random language mixture is found in informal situations in which the minority language is considered normal. The author argues that such switching is not random but serves definite and clearly understandable communicative ends. Underlying this phenomenon is seen to be the process of foregrounding (the highlighting of a word or a syntactical of phonological form by using its outside of its normal context), and the various contextual meaning derived through such alternation are discussed in some detail. The author concludes that an understanding of the extent to which minority groups use code alternations as a verbal strategy in everyday interaction and of the extent to which such groups are sensitive to the relationship between language and context is more important to the success of programs aiming at biculturalism and bilingualism than a knowledge of the ways in which nonstandard dialects differ grammatically and phonologically from Standard English. (FWB)

ED042173

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AL 002 537

Working Paper No. 36
Language-Behavior Research Laboratory
June 1970

The Language-Behavior Research Laboratory
is supported by PHS Research Grant No. 1 R01 MH 18188-01
from the National Institute of Mental Health and a grant from the
Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley.
This support is gratefully acknowledged.

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John J. Gumperz

Recent systematic research in the inner city has successfully disproved the notions of those who characterize the language of low income populations as degenerate and structurally underdeveloped. There is overwhelming evidence to show that both middle class and non-middle class children, no matter what their native language, dialect, or ethnic background, when they come to school at the age of five or six, have control of a fully formed grammatical system. The mere fact that their system is distinct from that of their teacher does not mean that their speech is not rule-governed. Speech features which strike the teacher as different do not indicate failure to adjust to some universally accepted English norm; rather, they are the output of dialect or language-specific syntactic rules which are every bit as complex as those of standard English (Labov, 1969).

It is clear furthermore that the above linguistic differences also reflect far-reaching and systematic cultural differences. Like the plural societies of Asia and Africa, American urban society is characterized by the coexistence of a variety of distinct cultures. Each major ethnic group has its own heritage, its own body of traditions, values and views about what is right and proper. These traditions are passed on from generation to generation as part of the informal family or peer group socialization process and are encoded in folk art and literature, oral or written.

To understand this complex system, it is first of all necessary to identify and describe its constituent elements. Grammatical analysis must be, and has to some extent been, supplemented by ethnographic description, ethnohistory, and the study of folk art (Hannerz, 1969;

Stewart, 1968; Abrahams,1964; Kochman, 1969). But mere description of component sub-systems is not enough if we are to learn how the plurality of cultures operates in everyday interaction and how it affects the quality of individual lives. Minority groups in urbanized societies are never completely isolated from the dominant majority. To study their life ways without reference to surrounding populations is to distort the realities of their everyday lives. All residents of modern industrial cities are subject to the same laws and are exposed to the same system of public education and mass communication. Minority group members, in fact, spend much of their day in settings where dominant norms prevail. Although there are significant individual differences in the degree of assimilation, almost all minority group members, even those whose behavior on the surface may seem quite deviant, have at least a passive knowledge of the dominant culture. What sets them off from others is not simply the fact that they are distinct, but the juxtaposition of their own private language and life styles with that of the public at large.

This juxtaposition, which is symbolized by constant alternation between in-group and out-group modes of acting and expression has a pervasive effect on everyday behavior. Successful political leaders such as the late Martin Luther King and Bobby Seale rely on it for much of their rhetorical effect. C. Kernan in her recent ethnographic study of verbal communication in an Afro-American community reports that her informants' everyday conversation reveals an overriding concern--be it positive or negative--with majority culture (Kernan, 1969).

Majority group members who have not experienced a similar disjuncture between private and public behavior frequently fail to appreciate its effect. They tend merely to perceive minority group members as different, without realizing the effect that this difference may have on everyday communication. This ignorance of minority styles of behavior

seems to have contributed to the often discussed notion of "linguistic deprivation." No one familiar with the writings of Afro-American novelists of the last decade and with the recent writings on black folklore can maintain that low income blacks are non-verbal. An exceptionally rich and varied terminological system, including such folk concepts as "sounding," signifying," "rapping," "running it down," "chucking," "jiving," "marking," etc., all referring to verbal strategies (i.e., different modes of achieving particular communicative ends), testifies to the importance which Afro-American culture assigns to verbal art (Kochman, 1969; Kernan, 1969). Yet, inner city black children are often described as non-verbal, simply because they fail to respond to the school situation. It is true that lower class children frequently show difficulty in performing adequately in formal interviews and psychological tests. But these tests are frequently administered under conditions which seem unfamiliar and, at times, threatening to minority group children. When elicitation conditions are changed, there is often a radical improvement in response (Labov, 1969; Mehan, 1970).

The fact that bilingualism and biculturalism have come to be accepted as major goals in inner city schools, is an important advance. But if we are to achieve this goal we require at least some understanding of the nature of code alternation and its meaning in everyday interaction. Bilingualism is, after all, primarily a linguistic term, referring to the fact that linguists have discovered significant alternations in phonology, morphology, and syntax, in studying the verbal behavior of a particular population. While bilingual phenomena have certain linguistic features in common, these features may have quite different social significance.

Furthermore, to the extent that social conditions affect verbal behavior, findings based on research in one type of bilingual situation may not necessarily be applicable to another socially different one.

Much of what we know about second language learning or on bilingual interference derives from work with monolingual college students learning a foreign language in a classroom. Other research on bilingualism has dealt with isolated middle class bilinguals residing in monolingual neighborhoods or with immigrant farmers or their descendents. We know least about the kind of situation where--as in the case of big city Afro-Americans or Chicanos--bilingualism has persisted over several generations and where strict barriers of caste limit or channel the nature of communication between the groups in question. Most importantly, we only have a minimal amount of information about the ways in which bilingual usage symbolizes the values of speakers and the social conditions in which they live.

The accepted paradigm for the linguistic study of bilingualism is the code-switching paradigm. Having observed that linguistic alternates exist at the level of phonology and syntax, we proceed to ask which alternates are used when and under what social circumstances. The assumption is that the stream of behavior can be divided into distinct social occasions, interaction sequences, or speech events. These events are assumed to be associated with culturally specific behavioral norms which, in turn, determine the speech forms to be used. To some extent, this is indeed the case.

In every society there are certain performative occasions, such as ceremonial events, court proceedings, greetings or formal introductions and the like, where the form of the language used is strictly prescribed and where deviations also change the definition of the event (Blom and Gumperz, 1970). When asked to report about their language usage, speakers tend to respond in such all-or-none terms. Hence, language censuses of urban neighborhoods in the U.S. usually indicate that the minority languages are used for informal, in-group, family interaction, while the majority language serves for communication with outsiders.

Tape recordings of conversation in natural settings, however, frequently reveal quite a different picture. A recent study of bilingual behavior in Texas, for example, reports many instances of what seems almost random language mixture (Lance, 1969;75-76).

1. Te digo que este dedo (I TELL YOU THAT THIS FINGER) has been bothering me so much.

   Se me hace que (IT SEEMS THAT) I have to respect her porque 'ta (BECAUSE SHE IS)

   But this arthritis deal, boy you get to hurting so bad you can't hardly even... 'cer masa pa tortillas (MAKE DOUGH FOR TORTILLAS).

In Texas, such language mixture tends to be disparaged and referred to by pejorative terms such as Tex Mex. It is rarely reported in the literature and frequently dismissed as abnormal. Nevertheless, such apparent language mixture is a common feature of informal conversation in urban bilingual societies.

When asked why they use English in situations where, according to their own reports, the minority language is normal, speakers tend to respond by stating that the English items in question are loan words, words for which there are no equivalents in the home language. But this is not always the case. On a number of occasions, Puerto Rican mothers in Jersey City could be heard calling to their children as follows:

2. Ven aquí, ven aquí.

If the child would not come immediately, this would be followed with:

Come here, you.

Clearly, it would be difficult to justify such alternation on the grounds of ease of expression. There is more to this message than can be conveyed by usage surveys. The English is used for stylistic effect to convey meaning. An English-speaking mother under similar conditions might respond to her child's failure to obey with something like:

3. John Henry Smith, you come here right away.

Both the English and the Puerto Rican mothers indicate annoyance, but they use different verbal strategies for doing so.

Let me illustrate this point with some additional examples from conversations recorded in Chicano and Afro-American groups in California (analyzed in more detail in Gumperz and Hernandez, 1970). Recordings in question were made by participants in group discussion, who also assisted in the analysis. The tapes were transcribed by a linguist, using detailed phonetic transcription wherever necessary, in order to isolate instances of code-switching. The contextual meaning of code-switches was then determined by a procedure which derives from the apparatus for conversational analysis developed by ethnomethodologists (Sacks, 1970; Schegloff, 1970). When in doubt, our hypothesis as to what was meant was checked with other participants in the conversation.

In the first two examples, the speakers are a faculty member at the University of California (E), and (M), a social worker in a day care center where E is working as a volunteer. Both speakers are native Americans of Mexican ancestry. The conversation ranges over a number of topics from the speaker's personal experience.

4. E. What do you dream in?

M. I don't think I ever have any conversations in my dreams. I just dream. Ha. I don' hear people talking; I jus' see pictures.

E. Oh, they're old-fashioned, then. They're not talkies yet, huh?

M. They're old-fashioned. No, they're not talkies yet. No, I'm tryin' to think. Yeah, there too have been talkies. Different. In Spanish and English both. An' I wouldn't be too surprised if I even had some in Chinese. (Laughter) Yeah, Ed. Deveras. (REALLY.) (M. offers E. a cigarette which is refused) Tu no fumas, verdad? Yo tampoco. Deje de fumar, (YOU DON'T SMOKE, DO YOU? I DON'T EITHER. I STOPPED SMOKING) and I'm back to it again.

M. breaks into Spanish just as she is about to offer E. a cigarette. The shift is accompanied by lowering of the voice of the type that accompanies confidentiality in monolinguals. She continues to talk about her smoking problem, explaining that she had given up the habit for a while, but that she had begun again during a period when she was visiting a friend in a local institution. On each visit she would buy a pack of cigarettes; the friend would smoke some and she would take the rest home and smoke them herself. Now notice the next passage.

5. E. That's all you smoked?

   M. That's all I smoked.

   E. An' how about... how about now?

   M. Estos... melos halle... estos Pall Malls me los... me los hallaron. (THESE... I FOUND... THESE PALL MALLS I... THEY WERE FOUND FOR ME.) No, I mean... that's all the cigarettes... that's all. They're the ones I buy.

Later on M. goes on to analyze her struggle with the smoking habit as follows:

6. M. Mm-huh. Yeah. An'... an'... an' they tell me, "How did you quit, Mary?" I di'n' quit. I... I just stopped. I mean it wasn't an effort that I made. Que voy a dejar de fumar porque me hace daño o (THAT I'M GOING TO STOP SMOKING BECAUSE IT'S HARMFUL TO ME, OR) this or tha', uh-uh. It just... that... eh... I used to pull butts out of the... the... the wastepaper basket. Yeah. (Laughter) I used to go look in the [...unclear...]. Se me acababan los cigarros en la noche. (MY CIGARETTES WOULD RUN OUT ON ME AT NIGHT.) I'd get desperate, y ahi voy al basurero a buscar, a sacar, you know? (Laughter) (AND THERE I GO TO THE WASTEBASKET TO LOOK FOR SOME, TO GET SOME, YOU KNOW?) Ayer los [...unclear...] no había que no traia cigarros Camille, no traia Helen, no traia yo, el Sr. de Leon, (YESTERDAY THE... THERE WEREN'T ANY. CAMILLE DIDN'T HAVE ANY, I, MR. DE LEON DIDN'T HAVE ANY) and I saw Dixie's bag crumpled up, so I figures she didn't have any, y ahi ando en los ceniceros buscando a ver onde estaba la... (AND THERE I AM IN THE ASHTRAYS LOOKING TO SEE WHERE THERE WAS THE...) I din' care whose they were.

Here again, what someone studying the passage sentence by sentence might regard as almost random alternation between the two languages, is highly meaningful in terms of the conversational context. M. is quite ambivalent about her smoking and she conveys this through her language use. Her choice of speech forms symbolizes her alternation between embarrassment and clinical detachment about her own condition. Spanish sentences reflect personal involvement (at least in this particular conversation), while English marks more general or detached statements.

Our next example derives from a discussion session recorded in Richmond, California by a black community worker. Participants include his wife and several teenage boys. Here we find alternation between speech features which are quite close to standard English and such typically black English features as lack of post-vocalic "r", double negation and copula deletion.

7. You can tell me how your mother worked twenty hours a day and I can sit here and cry. I mean I can cry and I can feel for you. But as long as I don't get up and make certain that I and my children don't go through the same, I ain't did nothin' for you, brother. That's what I'm talking about.

8. Now Michael is making a point, where that everything that happens in that house affects all the kids. It does. And Michael and you makin' a point, too. Kids suppose to learn how to avoid these things. But let me tell you. We're all in here. We talkin' but you see....

Note the underlined phrase in passage 7, with the typically black English phrase "ain't did nothin'" embedded in what is otherwise a normal standard English sequence. On our tape the shift is not preceded by a pause or marked off by special stress or intonation contours. The speaker is therefore not quoting from another code; his choice of form here lends emphasis to what he is saying. Passage 8 begins with a general statement addressed to the group as a whole. The speaker then turns to one person, Michael and signals this change in focus by dropping the copula "is" and shifting to black phonology.

It seems clear that in all these cases, what the linguist sees merely as alternation between two systems, serves definite and clearly understandable communicative ends. The speakers do not radically switch from one style to another, but they build on the coexistence of alternate forms to create meanings. To be sure, not all instances of code alternation are meaningful. Our tapes contain several instances where the shift into black English or the use of a Spanish word in an English sentence can only be interpreted as a slip of the tongue, frequently corrected in the next sentence, or where it must be regarded merely as a sign of the speaker's lack of familiarity with the style he is employing. But, even though such errors do occur, it is nevertheless true that code switching is also a communicative skill, which speakers use as a verbal strategy in much the same way that skillful writers switch styles in a short story.

How and by what devices does the speaker's selection of alternate forms communicate meaning? The process is a metaphoric process somewhat similar to what linguists interested in literary style have called foregrounding (Garvin, 1964). Foregrounding in the most general sense of the term, relies on the fact that words are more than just names for things. Words also carry a host of culturally specific associations, attitudes, and values. These cultural values derive from the context in which words are usually used and from the activities with which they are associated. When a word is used in other than its normal context, these associations become highlighted or foregrounded. Thus to take an example made famous by Leonard Bloomfield (1936), the word "fox" when it refers to a man, as in "he is a fox", communicates the notions of slyness and craftiness which our culture associates with the activities of foxes.

We assume that what holds true for individual lexical items also holds true for phonological or syntactic alternates. Whenever a speech

variety is associated with a particular social category of speakers or with certain activities, this variety comes to symbolize the cultural values associated with these features of the non-linguistic environment. In other words, speech varieties, like words, are potentially meaningful and, in both cases, this is brought out by re-interpreting meanings in relation to context. As long as the variety in question is used in its normal environment, only its basic referential sense is communicated. But when it is used in a new context, it becomes socially marked, by virtue of the fact that the values associated with the original context are mapped onto the new message.

In any particular instance of code switching, speakers deduce what is meant by an information processing procedure which takes as account of the speaker, the addressee, the social categories to which they can be assigned in the context, the topic, etc. (Blom and Gumperz, 1970). Depending on the nature of the above factors, a wide variety of contextual meanings derive from the basic meaning inclusion (we) versus exclusion (they). This underlying meaning is then re-interpreted in the light of the co-occurring contextual factors to indicate such things as degree of involvement (items 4 and 5), anger (items 2 and 3), emphasis (item 7), change in focus (item 8). In the following additional example, taken from a graduate student's recording of a Korean-English family conversation, Korean seems to be used simply as a device to direct one's question to one out of several potential addressees.

9. A. No, the lady used to know us. Ka mirri saram ya, ku wife-uga, mariji, odi University...yoginga, odinga... (YOU KNOW THAT MAN, HIS WIFE, I MEAN, WHICH UNIVERSITY...HERE, OR WHERE...)

   U. Tokaebbi katchi saenging saram? (YEAH, THE ONE THAT LOOKS LIKE A GHOST?)

   A. Unn. Dr. Kaeng katchiin saram. (YEAH, THE ONE THAT LOOKS LIKE DR. KAENG.)

L. Do teachers that teach in Japan have to have teaching credentials?

C. Well, it depends. If you're going to teach in a military installation.

Speakers A. and U. here are of the older generation of immigrants who are somewhat more imbued with Korean culture. L. and C. are college students who are probably most at home in English. Thus, A.'s shift to Korean is interpreted by U. as an invitation to respond similarly. L.'s use of English, along with her topic, mark her message as addressed to C.

On other occasions switching may simply serve as a sign to indicate that the speaker is quoting someone else:

10. Because I was speakin' to my baby...my ex-baby sitter, and we were talkin' about the kids you know, an' I was tellin' her ...uh, "Pero, como, you know,...uh...la Estela y la Sandi... relistas en el telefon. (BUT, HOW, YOU KNOW...UH...ESTELA AND SANDI ARE VERY PRECOCIOUS ON THE TELEPHONE.)

We have chosen examples of code switching from a number of languages to highlight the fact that the meanings conveyed by code switching are independent of the phonological shape or historical origin of the alternates in question. The association between forms and meaning is quite arbitrary. Any two alternates having the same referential meaning can become carriers of social meaning.

The ability to interpret a message is a direct function of the listener's home background, his peer group experiences and his education. Differences in background can lead to misinterpretation of messages. The sentence "he is a Sikh" has little or no meaning for an American audience. To anyone familiar with speech behavior in Northern India, however, it conveys a whole host of meanings since Sikhs are stereotypically know as bumblers. Similarly the above cited statement "he is a fox" which conveys slyness to middle class whites, is interpreted as a synonym for "he is handsome" in black culture. The process

of communication thus requires both shared grammar and shared rules of language usage. Two speakers may speak closely related and, on the surface, mutually intelligible varieties of the same language, but they may nevertheless misunderstand each other because of differences in usage rules resulting from differences in background. We must know the speakers' normal usage pattern, i.e., which styles are associated as unmarked forms with which activities and relationships, as well as what alternates are possible in what context, and what cultural associations these carry.

Note that the notion of culture that emerges from this type of analysis is quite different from the conventional one. Linguists attempting to incorporate cultural information into their descriptions tend to regard culture as a set of beliefs and attitudes which can be measured apart from communication. Even the recent work which utilizes actual speech samples by eliciting "subjective reactions" to these forms or evaluations, going considerably beyond earlier work, does not completely depart from this tradition, since it continues to rely on overt or conscious judgement. Our own material suggests that culture plays a role in communication which is somewhat similar to the role of syntactic knowledge in the decoding of referential meanings. Cultural differences, in other words, affect judgement both above and below the level of consciousness. A person may have every intention of avoiding cultural bias, yet by subconsciously superimposing his own interpretation on the verbal performances of others, he may, nevertheless, bias his judgement of their general ability, efficiency, etc.

We know very little about the distribution of usage rules in particular populations. For example, there seems to be no simple correlation with ethnic identity, nor is it always possible to predict usage rules on the basis of socio-economic indexes. To go back for a moment to the Puerto Rican neighborhood referred to above: While the

majority of the Puerto Ricans in our Jersey City block followed usage patterns like those described above, there are others residing among them whose patterns differ significantly. A Puerto Rican college student took a tape recorder home and recorded informal family conversation over a period of several days. It is evident from his recording, and he himself confirms this in interviews, that in his family, English serves as the normal medium of informal conversation while Spanish is socially marked and serves to convey special connotations of intimacy and anger.

It follows that while the usual sociological measures of ethnic background, social class, educational achievements, etc., have some correlation with usage rules, they cannot be regarded as accurate predictors of performance in particular instances. On the contrary, social findings based on incomplete data or on populations different from those for which they were intended, may themselves contribute to cultural bias. The use of responses to formal tests and interviews to judge the verbal ability of lower class bilinguals is a case in point. Rosenthal has shown that teachers' expectations have a significant effect on learning (1969) and psychological experiments by Williams (1969) and Henrie (1969) point to the role that dialect plays in generating these expectations. When expectations created by dialect stereotypes are further reinforced by misapplied or inaccurate social science findings, education suffers. An incident from a tape-recorded session in Black Language Arts will illustrate the point.

11. Student: (Reading from an autobiographical essay) This lady didn't have no sense.

    Teacher: What would be another way of saying that sentence?

    Student: She didn't have any sense. But not this lady; she <u>didn't have no sense.</u>

It happens that in the above case both student and teacher were Black, and the classroom atmosphere was relaxed. Thus, the student felt free to give the response she gave. Had the situation been more constrained, she would not have been able to convey what she really wanted to say.

Our final example derives from classroom observation of first grade reading sessions in a racially integrated California school district. Classes in the district include about 60 percent White and 40 percent Chicano, Black, and Oriental children. College student observers find that most reading classes have a tracking system such that children are assigned to fast or slow reading groups and these groups are taught by different methods and otherwise receive different treatment.

Even in first grade reading periods, where presumably all children are beginners, the slow reading groups tend to consist of 90 percent Blacks and Chicanos. Does this situation reflect real learning difficulties or is it simply a function of our inability to diagnose reading aptitude in culturally different children? Furthermore, given the need for some kind of ability grouping, how effective and how well adapted to cultural needs are the classroom devices that are actually used to bridge the reading gap?

Recently we observed a reading session with a slow reading group of three children, and seven fast readers. The teacher worked with one group at a time, keeping the others busy with individual assignments. With the slow readers she concentrated on the alphabet, on the spelling of individual words, and supposedly basic grammatical concepts such as the distinctions between questions and statements. She addressed the children in what White listeners would identify as pedagogical style. Her enunciation was deliberate and slow. Each word was clearly articulated with even stress and pitch, as if to avoid any verbal sign of emotion, approval or disapproval. Children were expected to speak only when called upon and the teacher would insist that each question be answered before responding to further ideas. Unsolicited remarks were ignored even if they referred to the problem at hand. Pronunciation errors were corrected whenever they occurred, even if the reading task had to be interrupted. The children seemed

distracted and inattentive. They were guessing at answers, 'psyching out' the teacher in the manner described by Holt (1965) rather than following her reasoning process. The following sequence symbolizes the artificiality of the situation:

Teacher: Do you know what a question is? James, ask William a question.

James: William, do you have a coat on?

William: No, I do not have a coat on.

James asks his question and William answers in a style which approaches in artificiality that of the teacher, characterized by citation form pronunciation of ([ey] rather than [ə]) of the indefinite article, lack of contraction of 'do not', stress on the 'have', staccato enunciation as if to symbolize what they perceive to be the artificiality and incomprehensibility of the teacher's behavior.

With the advanced group on the other hand reading became much more of a group activity and the atmosphere was more relaxed. Words were treated in context, as part of a story. Children were allowed to volunteer answers. There was no correction of pronunciation, although some deviant forms were also heard. The children actually enjoyed competing with each other in reading and the teacher responded by dropping her pedagogical monotone in favor of more animated natural speech. The activities around the reading table were not lost on the slow readers who were sitting at their desks with instructions to practice reading on their own. They kept looking at the group, neglecting their own books, obviously wishing they could participate. After a while one boy picked up a spelling game from a nearby table and began to work at it with the other boy, and they began to argue in a style normal for black children. When their voices were raised the teachers turned and asked them to go back to reading.

In private conversation, the teacher who is very conscientious and seemingly concerned with all her children's progress, justified her ability grouping on the grounds that children in the slow group lacked books in their homes and "did not speak proper English." She stated they needed practice in grammar and abstract thinking and pronunciation and suggested that given this type of training they would eventually be able to catch up with the advanced group. We wonder how well she will succeed. Although clearly she has the best motives and would probably be appalled if one were to suggest that her ability grouping and her emphasis on the technical aspects of reading and spelling with culturally different children is culturally biased, her efforts are not so understood by the children themselves. Our data indicates that the pedagogical style used with slow readers carries different associations for low middle class and low income groups. While whites identify it as normal teaching behavior, ghetto residents associate it with the questioning style of welfare investigators and automatically react by not cooperating. In any case, attuned as they are to see meaning in stylistic choice, the black children in the slow reading group cannot fail to notice that they are being treated quite differently and with less understanding than the advanced readers.

What are the implications of this type of situation for our understanding of the role of dialect differences on classroom learning? There is no question that the grammatical features of black dialects discovered by urban dialectologists in recent years are of considerable importance for the historical study of the origin of these dialects and for linguistic theory in general, but this does not necessarily mean that they constitute an impediment to learning. Information on black dialect is often made known to educators in the form of simple lists of deviant features with the suggestion that these features might interfere with reading. There is little if any experimental evidence that the pronunciations characteristic

of urban Black English actually interfere with the reading process. Yet the teacher in our classroom for example spent considerable time attempting to teach her s'ow readers the distinction between pin and pen. Lack of a vowel distinction in these two words is widespread among Blacks but also quite common among Whites in Northern California. In any case there is no reason why homophony in this case should present more difficulty than homophony in such words as 'sea' and 'see' and 'know' and 'no' or that created by the midwestern dialect speaker's inability to distinguish 'Mary', 'marry', and 'merry'.

The problem of contextual relevance is not confined to contact with speakers of Black English. It also applies, for example, to the teaching of both English and Spanish in bilingual schools. When interviewed about their school experiences, Pureto Rican high school students in New York as well as Texas and California Chicano students uniformly complain about their lack of success in Spanish instruction. They resent the fact that their Spanish teachers single out their own native usages as sub-standard and inadmissable both in classroom speech and writing.

It is not enough simply to present the educator with the descriptive linguistic evidence on language or dialect differences. What we need is properly controlled work on reading as such, work which does not deal with grammar alone. Our data suggests that urban language differences, while they may or may not interfere with reading, do have a significant influence on a teacher's expectation, and hence on the learning environment. In other words, regardless of overtly expressed attitudes, the teachers are quite likely to be influenced by what they preceive as deviant speech and failure to respond to questions and will act accordlingly, thus potentially inhibiting the students' desire to learn. Since bilinguals and bi-dialectals rely heavily on code-switching as a verbal strategy, they are especially sensitive to the

relationship between language and context. It would seem that they learn best under conditions of maximal contextual reinforcement. Sole concentration on the technical aspects of reading, grammar and spelling may so adversely affect the learning environment as to outweigh any advantages to be gained.

It seems clear furthermore that progress in urban language instruction is not simply a matter of better teaching aids and improved text books. Middle class adults have to learn to appreciate differences in communicative strategies of the type discussed here. Teachers themselves must be given instruction in both the linguistic and ethnographic aspects of speech behavior. They must become acquainted with code selection rules in formal and informal settings as well as those themes of folk literature and folk art that form the input to these rules, so that they can diagnose their own communication problems and adapt methods to their children's background.

Notes

Research reported on in this paper has been supported by grants from the Urban Crisis Program and the Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley. I am grateful to Eduardo Hernandez and Louisa Lewis, for assistance in field work and analysis.

The point of view expressed in this paper leans heavily on the work of Claudia Kernan (1969).

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